

THE MUSCULOSKELETAL MEDICAL UNIT AT BIDMC, A MULTIDISCIPLINARY UNIT

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It is infrequent to have a medical unit within an orthopedic clinic. The musculoskeletal medical unit (MSMU) at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) is a unique entity within the Orthopedic Department. Established ten years ago, the MSMU consists of rheumatologists, internists specialized in sport medicine, emergency medicine physicians with sport fellowship training, and nurse practitioners.

The MSMU clinicians see a wide array of regional pain conditions, arthritides, and sport injuries. In 2008, MSMU providers (NPs and physicians) saw a total of 5,458 patients. On average, 60% of all new patients were seen within two weeks of requesting an appointment.

The MSMU is a part of the orthopedic clinics and is located on the second floor of the Shapiro building on Brookline Avenue, part of the East Campus at BIDMC.

The integration of the MSMU with the orthopedic department provides timely access to needed expertise such as sports medicine, total joint arthroplasty, hand and trauma surgeons, orthopedic oncologists, and the spine center which include spine orthopedists, neurosurgeons, and physiatrists. Having a rheumatologist as a part of the MSMU adds an important value in discovering underlying inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and gout that often present initially as regional joint pain.

Additionally, there are radiology and physical therapy services available on the same floor. An orthotic and cast clinic staffed with orthopedist technicians is readily available, providing access to a wide range of prefabricated and custom-made braces, orthoses, and casts. This setup facilitates patients obtaining their medical evaluation and essential diagnostic testing including radiographic and laboratory work up and proceeding with the initial treatment regimen.

There is a close collaboration between the MSMU, the radiology department, and the pain clinic at BIDMC. The radiology department provides specialized imaging such as MRI and interventional radiology services for injections and arthrograms. The pain clinic works closely with the MSMU and provides further pain management and pain related interventions such as fluoroscopy-guided procedures.

This MSMU design not only ensures timely evaluation and treatment; it also provides the patient with access to the appropriate needed expertise. This diagnostic and treatment strategy is further reinforced by the logistical design of the unit and the close collaborations among the different services and specialties. Thus, the MSMU provides a practical multidisciplinary approach for patients with musculoskeletal complaints.

Patients are referred to the unit by many primary care practices with and without BIDMC affiliation, in addition to referrals from within the orthopedic department and from other departments within the hospital. The emergency department is an important source of referrals as well.

